

Don't Believe In Luck

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Don't Believe In Luck

by [bramble_patch \(Marianne_Dashwood\)](#), [personalized_radio](#)

Summary

Scar is, above all else, lucky. He is smart, yes, smarter than most people would give him credit for and then some. He has a talented eye for detail, and an even greater talent for talking himself into and out of trouble. But he would have been killed a thousand times over if it wasn't for the pure and simple fact that Scar is lucky.

A Hermitcraft prelude to *Can't Find My Way Home* , wherein Scar is a stray.

Notes

Hello hello!! This, as you might see, is not the coda. We're working on it, we promise!! It is, however, a small prequel, because I, Bramble, have gotten very into Hermitcraft recently (and you should too!)

Anyway, if you haven't read *Can't Find My Way Home*, you should probably do that, because this fic will make zero sense without it - go on, I know you want too!

This one is for Luna and Expo specifically, because it is your fault I'm in hermitcraft hell and that I'm loving every second of it.

Scar is, above all else, lucky. He is smart, yes, smarter than most people would give him credit for and then some. He has a talented eye for detail, and an even greater talent for talking himself into and out of trouble. But he would have been killed a thousand times over if it wasn't for the pure and simple fact that Scar is lucky.

His mother called it a faerie's gift. They moved around a lot, part of the traveling caravan that he had been born into, full of interesting people from every corner of the world. People just like him and his mother, people with talented hands and sharp minds, with the song of the road echoing in their ears. People who, for better or for worse, were unable to remain still for long.

A lot of them, Scar's mother said, were gifted, just like him. Not exactly, of course; they were never quite the same. One always knew the safest way for the wagons to go. Someone else, whatever wound they tended would always heal smoothly, safe from infection. And Scar's gift was that things always seemed to turn out his way.

He hadn't always been lucky. His mother tells of the night he was born, so stormy they almost lost half the horses to panic and lightning. He had been born a sickly child, but no matter what, after the sun had risen and the horses had been rounded up and the breath entered clear into his lungs, he lived. No matter what, the winter sickness and the spring chill that swept through their camp never touched him.

On the rare occasions he was unable to talk himself out of the situations he found himself in, he was always able to move just quickly enough, walking stick and all to get away. He was always able to find a scrap of food and drinkable water in dire situations. Whenever he fell, he would always be able to get back up.

Early in his second decade, he left the wagons. The road called, but so did the urge to build, to create. The wagon, for all that it had raised him, was transient. It left no trace of itself behind, save in the memories of those who saw it. Scar wanted to create more than memories. On his many journeys in the year leading up to his departure, Scar had trailed the outlines of cliffs, mountains, valleys and hills, and wished he could make something as permanent as nature could.

And so, build Scar did. He needed no luck to prove himself or his talents. He needed no luck to study technique, landscaping, the art of bending nature to his will.

Of course, his study needed funding. So he built up more than landscapes; shops, businesses, a traveling wagon of his very own. His renown grew, both on the basis of his merits and skill and only occasionally because of his silver tongue. And while Scar was lucky more often than not, that did not mean that he didn't fail, nor that there were no setbacks. Gradually, his walking stick; ornate, carved oak, had to be put to the side in the favor of similarly ornately decorated crutches, sturdier and with better support. The days he used them became more frequent than his days without them. His businesses failed, often, but that never stopped him from gathering himself up and trying again in the next city.

Scar was good at what he did. He had a better eye for design than most architects despite his lack of formal training. He had a perfectionist's eye and would not stop until every blade of grass was perfect. Though he would never say it himself, he was more than merely good. Even more than great.

He was utterly exceptional.

And like many utterly exceptional people in this world, it came with a cost. But not one he ever could have foreseen.

The eyes came first. Then the claws, and the teeth, and then his skin turns paler than if he had just been lowered into the grave.

When he wakes up with blood dripping from his fangs and from his claws, he takes his wagon and he goes back to his mother. She's always known more about these things than he. And if not her, then the wagons have always been full of strange folk. Scar arrives, claws and teeth and eyes and all, and it isn't long until he is given a direction and a goal. An older woman with golden eyes sits with his mother and directs him to pack for another realm that he didn't even know existed.

When he sets out, he does so with his mother's home cooked stew fueling his steps, his people's advice ringing in his ears, and the beating echo of home tugging at his heart.

The ghost of his mother's arms hug him as he finally crosses over that obsidian gate.

The Nether is, quite frankly, not Scar safe. He skirts by the screaming ghosts by mere inches, and thanks his lucky stars that he manages to observe the strange, gold hoarding pigs before they spot him, and it gives him enough time to dig out some scraps of gold and hang them from his clothes like silent bells.

His heart tells him to go up, and so, avoiding the various Nether denizens, he does.

Climbing is dizzying. He loses time as he goes, his mind becoming sharper, more focused. He doesn't like it. For all the sense of purpose that these breaks in reality give him, he hates it. It strips him of something undeniable, something that makes him *Scar*. He doesn't want to stop being Scar. Still, he climbs.

When he sees the palace of the Inbetween, it's like he can breathe for the first time since the fangs appeared in his mouth. His fingers are torn, ragged by the claws and the strange rock under his feet, from pulling himself up. His back aches, deep in a way that he doesn't think came from his backpack. But, he's home, he knows.

He is escorted into the palace by two mute, masked figures. They open the doors to the throne room and in the silence that follows, Scar sees her.

The Blaze Empress, as he now knows her to be, is as beautiful as she is terrifying. He is ushered in by her robed attendants, and catches sight of a couple dozen others, all the same save for the differing symbols on their mask. Some regard him with interest, their gaze piercing even through the mask. Others barely even glance his way.

As he approaches the throne, he spots more than the masked courtiers. There's perhaps half a dozen, all unique, and yet, all have the same features; Eyes the color of the moon, long claws, sharpened teeth, and to Scar's horror, some bear blood covered bone wings.

"Welcome, my child," Her voice snaps Scar out of his revirie of terror. He finds that he can no longer look at anything except for her. "Have you come to join my court, or have you merely come to repay your debt?"

Scar, for perhaps the first time in his life, is speechless. He doesn't know his answer, despite the question ruminating in his mind the entire journey.

"I... I do not know, my lady."

The Empress purses her lips, but otherwise nods, and gestures to the maskless.

"You have been called to my court, an opportunity afforded to very few. You will have the chance to see the benefits that joining my court would bring you. Power. Magic. Immortality. Spend time here with your fellows and learn what there is to learn. But my offer does not come without its limits. Make your choice quickly, or your blood will decide for you."

She raises her hand, dropping him out of her sight, and it's like a weight is lifted from his shoulders. A clear dismissal.

"Well," Scar says, "That was ominous,"

"That's just how the Empress is," A voice rumbles behind him, and Scar jumps a mile. The Empress, thankfully, has turned her attention to other matters and doesn't regard his startled yelp.

"Jeez, you scared me!" Scar says, holding his heart and leaning heavily on his crutches.

"Sorry," The person says, and Scar is finally able to take him in.

The same eyes as the others, pale skin, dark hair. His claws are wickedly sharp, covered in ink blots rather than dried blood, and his grin is even sharper. But behind that is mischief and an intelligence and confidence that lies in his easy grin, the slope and set of his shoulders. And behind those shoulders, arching bone wings, picked clean as they tuck into his body. Scar forces himself to look away.

He holds out a hand, as clawed and dangerous as they may seem.

"Cub," He introduces himself. Scar can't help but grin in return.

"Scar."

"Good to have you here, Scar," Cub says, and pulls him forward, "Come on. I'll show you around."

Cub is a good tour guide, for as much as the Inbetween is full of endless, identical white hallways, populated by silent, gliding masked figures. Cub is an even better conversationalist

than he is a tour guide, and Scar finds talking to him easier than perhaps anyone else in his life.

He discovers Cub is an engineer, one of the very best. Scar isn't surprised when it turns out that he's heard of him, or at least his work.

"No wonder the Empress wants me," Cub laughs in his thick drawl.

"Is that why?" Scar asks, and Cub sobers, "Because as exceptional as I may be, redstone knowledge leaks out of my mind like, well, redstone dust. Why does she want me?"

Cub snorts, "Dude, have you ever looked at your buildings? With us two, the Empress will have the most impressive castle in any dimension."

"It's already pretty impressive," Scar admits, "I could stare at it forever."

"Really, huh?" Cub says, with no judgment, only simple interest, "That the only thing worth stayin' for?"

"I don't know. Magic seems pretty cool too, but I don't know magic like I know building."

"You'll learn," Cub shrugs. Another masked figure passes them, "They did."

Scar startles. He supposes he should have known, but it still shocks him to have it confirmed.

"How?" He asks, but Cub shakes his head.

"You'll see tonight," He says instead, "Python has made up his mind to stay, and the Empress likes to make a show of it. Show us all what we're missing out on if we say no."

Scar bolts down on his curiosity and lets Cub continue the tour. It ends in a small, sequestered courtyard, rooms surrounding a gentle fountain in the east wing of the palace. Next to a library, Scar notes with interest, no matter how the words may change whenever he tries to read.

It's comfortable, if as plain as the rest of the Inbetween's colors. Scar will have to change that, if he stays. Plain white sheets on simple cots and a few other strays; sleeping, talking quietly, reading. Less than a dozen of them, total, and each of them with the same distinctive features.

"How....how do you get the wings?" Scar asks. His back aches.

Cub grimaces. "Painfully."

Cub departs after showing him the washroom, leaving Scar to scrub the ruddy remains of the Nether off his skin. He at least wants to look presentable for whatever is going to happen to Python this evening. When he exits the room, he spots the man in question being clapped on the back and spoken to animatedly by their fellow strays. Scar tries not to be jealous of the conviction and naked relief on his face, and spends far too long than is necessary organizing his new temporary living space.

The ceremony itself, for all the splendor of the Inbetween, is simple.

Python is dressed in those same, long flowing robes, identical to the other courtiers save for the fact his face remains uncovered.

He kneels before the throne and the Empress regards him with an eye of favor.

“Do you, my child, come to accept my gift, wholly and fully?”

“I do, your majesty.” He responds, practiced.

“And do you dedicate yourself to myself and my court, to protect it against any enemy and to never conspire against it, pledging your loyalty, wholly and fully?”

“I do, your majesty.”

“And do you understand that by accepting your place in my court, you forsake your humanity, now and forever more, to become Vex, wholly and fully?”

“I do, your majesty.”

“Then,” The Empress stands, and extends a hand towards the kneeling stray, “Let it be done.”

Scar expects Python to take the outstretched palm, but he does not. Instead, he turns his face up to the Empress, like she is the dawning sun itself, and her hand, pointed and intentional, rests about his face.

The Empress reaches forward with a finger and, as Scar stands on his tiptoes to try and see, his crutches the only thing keeping him steady, she touches, ever so lightly, upon his forehead.

Light bursts from the contact, sweeping whirls of light that dance and convalesce around Python’s face, eyes wide and awestruck as he stares up at his Empress.

It's bright, brighter than a supernova and Scar almost - almost - looks away.

Then the light shimmers and solidifies, from particles to porcelain and the magic settles into a mask. Etched upon it is scratched squares, a downturned mouth - a creeper.

“Welcome,” The Empress says, “to your true home.”

When Python stands, it is to the identical, practiced applause of the Inbetween.

“What happens,” Scar asks Cub, back in that silent courtyard of pristine white cots, “if you don’t join her court, but you don’t want to make a deal either?”

Cub’s face, for the first time, is expressionless, but deliberately so. He appears to be working very hard to school his expression into something unreadable.

“Nothing good,” He finally replies, and blows out the candle.

It's difficult to parse time in the Inbetween; it appears that only the strays really sleep, or even have a concept of mealtimes. Most of the food provided is bland; plain pork chops or crisp white bread, enough to get by but not enough to satisfy.

Scar, whose legs have taken their revenge on him for daring to walk through the Nether, is brought breakfast in bed by Cub. In comparison to the other strays, who, in the wake of Python's ascension, have a sadness weighing on them that they didn't before, Cub is blinding in his enthusiasm to get to know Scar.

Like Cub told him about his redstone skills, Scar tells him about his landscapes. Rolling hills and soaring cliffs, and the building he constructs on top of them and the wagons that serve as his home, no matter what the Empress might say. Cub nods along with a joy in his eyes that Scar cannot quite parse when he hears about the wagons.

"I'd like to see some of your work one day," Cub says, after a while, when Scar finishes a long winding tale about the wagons and a particularly tricky journey across the Badlands, "I bet your folks are proud."

"My mom," Scar says, slightly bashfully, "She always said I had the faerie's gift. She was worried when I left, but she's never stopped me from doing what I want to do. I know she's waiting for me."

Cub hums. "Python didn't have anyone left, back in the Overworld. Another reason he decided to stay, probably."

"And you?" Scar asks, "Do you have anyone waiting for you, Cub?"

Cub just sighs, pats Scar's knee. "Eat. You'll need your strength. Your back still hurtin'?"

Scar nods.

"Give me a holler if it gets any worse. I'll be nearby. Figuring out a way to get you up and around this place, huh?"

Scar blinks, goes to say something, but his mouth is full of bread, and he can't swallow in time for a response.

Scar spends the rest of the day in bed, thinking about wagons and hills that have a tide like the sea as he trundles past them and his mother's warm stew. When Cub returns, bringing him another meal of plain meats and bread, he has the plans for a compact wheelchair that can fit in a pack and fold out when needed. They spend the rest of the night, heads bowed together as Scar suggests improvements and modifications. He's never felt more at home.

The next morning, his back is the problem, not his legs. The other strays throw him sympathetic looks, and Cub rushes to his side when he sees the pained expression on his face.

"Oh jeez," Cub says, "I thought you had more time."

"What's -?"

Cub shushes him. “It’s okay. The Inbetween is prepared for this. It’s gonna be rough, but I’m not going anywhere.”

It shouldn’t be as reassuring as it is. He’s only known Cub two days, and yet he’s felt more kinship with him than he has anyone else. The way Cub grips his hand makes Scar think that Cub might feel the same.

Scar doesn’t remember the rest of the day.

When he comes back to himself, another stray is gone. They made a deal, and left the Court entirely. According to Cub, the Queen isn’t particularly happy, and the rapidly approaching deadline of some other strays isn’t helping the tense atmosphere that Scar wakes up too.

Oh, and there are the wings. Bony and far too unwieldy, Scar finds that the Inbetween is, in fact, prepared for this eventuality. He finds cloths to clean them with ease, and the clothes provided for him are pre-cut, allowing them free.

“How long have I got?” Scar asks Cub that evening, as they sit in the library with Cub’s blueprints around them, Scar’s messy scrawl covering them.

“More time than me. And more time than poor Taurtis.”

“Taurtis?”

Cub nods as the man in question walks past the open library door. He looks even paler than the other strays, a washed out gray that stands out against the pristine white of the Inbetween. The bones on his back twitch.

“He doesn’t know,” Cub explains, “Whether he wants to stay or not. What kind of deal he can afford to make. I don’t know him well, but I know he has friends back in the Overworld. Whether or not that’s enough...”

Cub trails off.

“Would it be?” Scar asks, “For you?”

Maybe that is too much of a personal question for someone you have known barely seventy-two hours, but Cub just sighs. “I don’t know, Scar. I really don’t know.”

Taurtis runs out of time less than an hour later. There are shouts from the courtyard, screams. By the time the two of them arrive, there is blood marring the marble, an injured girl being carried back to the cots, and a monster screeching its displeasure.

The worst part is that it’s unmistakably human. But there is blood caught in its teeth, claws long and sharp and scraping deep grooves into the stone columns as it roars, and there is nothing left of a person in its milky white eyes. It is a terrible thing, all elongated limbs and cracking tortured bones that still have not stopped in their change.

Like a routine, like this is a common occurrence, several of the masked courtiers descend into the room. In moments, those claws are bound, the creature restrained. Under the weight of

these creatures with the power of a goddess behind them, the transformed Taurtis is nothing. He is bundled away as the two of them watch, helpless to stop or to aid their fellow stray.

One of the others is crying. There's another distributing potions of regeneration, health, from the same cabinets that held the bandages that Scar still has wrapped around the wounds from his wings.

Scar only stays in the room long enough for the smell of copper to entirely overwhelm him, and then he's making a break for the bathroom furthest from the scene. It's only luck that he makes it there in time before his breakfast makes an unwelcome appearance.

He feels Cub's hand on his back a few minutes later, his presence coming down to kneel beside him on the floor..

"Is that -?"

"Yeah," Cub sighs, "That's it. That's what happens if you don't make the right choice."

"The right choice?" Scar says, wiping his mouth, "The *right choice*? They took him away like an animal, and that's meant to - meant to -"

"Scare us," Cub says, quietly, "They want to scare us."

"How is scaring us supposed to make us want to stay?!" Scar bursts out, "I thought this was *our* choice!"

"She wants us to stay." Cub says, firmly, pulling Scar around by his shoulders, "That's it. All of this, the dorms, the library, the medical supplies easy to hand, all of that is supposed to try and persuade us to stay. She doesn't pick just anyone. Python was a world famous diplomat, Taurtis was an architect that was being commissioned by royalty, for god's sake! Just look at what the two of us managed to do in a few days! She wants us to stay, and she doesn't care how we agree, just that we do."

Scar feels his stomach dropping into the floor. "And when we do, what happens? What really happened to Python? To Taurtis?"

Cub sighs, "They ain't human anymore. At least Python is still in control of himself, mostly. Not bein' able to lie, that coldness that haunts you, that's the Vex. That's what you'd be, if you'd say yes. Taurtis, well. She needs soldiers somehow."

"She *can* 't -"

"She can." Cub says. "She can do anything. Give *us* anything."

Scar, as if he could pull the Vex blood from himself, clutches at his chest, "At the cost of our *souls*. I'm something else, as a Vex. *Someone* else. That isn't *me*. If I agreed, I wouldn't be *me*."

Cub sighs, "You're too good for this place. Too good for her."

“And you aren’t?”

“Maybe not,” Cub says, and Scar feels like he might throw up again.

“Cub,” He says, “Cub, tell me you aren’t going to -”

“And what else have I got?” Cub raises his voice, the first time Scar has ever heard him do so, “Sure, I got jobs back home, but what else? I got no one, Scar, no one waitin’ for me like you’ve got your mom. Way I see it, there’s no difference between this world and the one I left behind. No one would miss me, they’d just miss what I can *do* for them.”

“I’d miss you,” Scar says, and only realizes it’s true once the words had left his mouth. It’s a truth that had crept up on him, bloomed under days in bed and bent over books. He’s met a lot of people. None of them were Cub. Cub is a kindred soul to Scar in a way he’s never met before.

The admission seems to have pulled Cub up short, and he blinks owlishly at Scar.

“Really?”

“Neither of us can lie, Cub,” Scar says. “But I wouldn’t want to, anyway. Not to you. This isn’t a good place. It isn’t a kind place. I wouldn’t want any friend of mine stuck in a place like this, where they couldn’t leave. But more than that, I’d... I would miss you, if you decided to stay.”

“And would you stop me?” Cub asks, softly “If I really wanted to stay here?”

Scar wants to say no. But he can’t really lie.

“You’re my friend.” Scar says, slowly, “But if you wanted this, really wanted it... I wouldn’t stop you.”

“You know,” Cub says, quiet as they sit together on the tiled floor, much like they did in the library less than an hour before, “You don’t have to miss me.”

“I’m not staying,” Scar says, abruptly.

Cub raises an eyebrow, “I didn’t realize you had decided.”

“Neither did I,” Scar replies, “Until right now. I want to go, and I want you to come with me, Cub.”

“Is that you or the part of you that can’t lie talking?” Cub asks, rueful. As if he’s already come to terms with his fate.

“It’s me.” Scar says, “Cub, come on. My mom will love you, you can see the wagons! Finish your projects.”

Cub snorts, almost derisive if Scar didn’t know him, now, and so Scar adds, quieter, “I thought you said you wanted to see my builds.”

Cub stiffens, and pulls himself off the bathroom floor. “I don’t have time for this. I *literally* don’t have time for this, Scar, unless you want me to end up like Taurtis. And if you don’t want to be just a monster ready to be let off the leash whenever she wants, I would suggest you do the same.”

“Cub -”

“Just,” Cub pauses at the door, and gods, he sounds exhausted. Scar hadn’t noticed that before, and in all the hours together, he had never asked how long Cub had been here. “Do what you do best, Scar. Make a deal.”

The throne room is as intimidating as when he first arrived, but Scar doesn’t think about improvements or additions as he walks towards the throne, not anymore. He’s getting the heck out. He’s leaving the Nether, he’s walking back home and he’s sleeping for a thousand years. Then going on holiday. And getting a cat.

Gods, he wants to get out of here.

“You have made a decision, then,” The Empress says, as he kneels before the throne. Off to the side, some of the other strays have gathered. He hopes Cub is there, but he doesn’t dare look away from the Empress.

“The only one I could make, your Majesty,” He replies, with a slight smile. She purses her lips and he bites back any harsh words, still thinking of blood on perfectly white floors and the utter lack of it when he returned to the dorms. The cold efficiency makes him shiver, even now. “I thank you for your opportunity, your Majesty, but I unfortunately must decline.”

“Has none of the court impressed you?” The Empress asks, with vague disdain. “Have my halls not pleased you? Has my library not enticed you? I called you here for your greatness, but you still have much left to learn. Do you not wish to be exceptional?”

“Not like this, your Majesty. The cost to enter your court is too high for me.”

“You wish to remain mortal? You will refuse immortality, power, magic well beyond your means?”

“Yes, your Majesty.”

“Very well,” The Empress says, her face like the marble that makes up her castle. “Yet there remains a debt to be paid. For your humanity, what would you sacrifice?”

Scar swallows. This is the tough part. He’s been thinking this over ever since that last talk with Cub.

“I think I have just the thing, your Majesty,” Scar says, and in a breath, it’s like he’s back where he belongs. Back in control. “My mother once told me that I had the faerie’s gift, you see. There have been many times where I should have been hurt, or killed or suffered

unwanted consequences. I am, in a word, lucky. So that is what I offer you.” Scar grins, feeling freer than he has ever since his eyes first changed color, “My luck.”

For the first time, the Empress smiles.

“Very well. Your debt is paid, child.”

It feels like a sigh, a breath before falling asleep. Something undeniable slips away from him, but he is lighter than he has ever been. He has never been without the Empress’ gift, but he feels it leave him with no regret.

“Thank you, your Majesty.” He says, “And thank you for your hospitality. I will never forget my time here.”

“Of course.” The Empress is clearly no longer interested in him, “This court will conclude its session, unless there is anyone else left to speak?”

The silence is loud. Louder still, though, is the shout from the corner of the room, the corner where the strays were standing.

“I would, your Majesty!”

Pushing his way to the front, Cub appears. Scar’s heart leaps into his throat, watching his friend approach the dias as the Empress regards him closely.

“Have you come to a decision, my child?” The Empress asks, “Your time grows short. I would rather not lose such talent to mindlessness.”

“And I would rather not be lost,” Cub says, with a small, rueful smile, “So I have come to tell you my decision.”

He takes a deep breath, and Scar holds his.

“I cannot remain, I’m afraid,” Cub says, “There is so much left to see in this world. Cities, people...” His head turns, and meets Scar’s eye, and Scar can feel himself start to breathe again in a wave of relief, “Landscapes.”

“Very well.” The Empress says, her annoyance palpable, “You know the terms. A cost must be paid for one such as you to leave.”

Cub inclines his head, “Of course, your Majesty. And in truth, I feel...constrained by the expectations placed on me by the world. If this is excellence, then I want none of it. I would give you my talents, the ability to be exceptional in anything. There is so much to learn, your Majesty, and I cannot be excellent at it all. So I won’t be. Instead of brilliance in one aspect, I would rather be a jack of all trades, and a master of none.”

“You have given this much thought, it seems,” The Empress seems, “I am always sorry to lose strays like the two of you. Still, I accept your terms, and I release you from your obligation. Your debts are paid.”

Cub sighs, long and relieved, “Thank you, your Majesty.”

The Empress waves a hand and stands. The court is dismissed, and so are Cub and Scar.

“You didn’t stay,” Scar says, when Cub makes his way over to him. Cub shakes his head.

“I had a friend knock some sense into me before it was too late.”

Scar grins, “Sounds like a good friend.”

“The best,” Cub replies. “Besides, I’ve seen you, Scar. I don’t think you’d survive the Nether on your own, luck or no.”

“Hey, I survived it once!” Scar insists, and shoulders his rucksack.

“You just gave up your luck,” Cub points out, doing the same, but Scar shakes his head.

“Luck is just a state of *mind*, my friend! Luck is merely a word, a prop, a tool -”

The ground under his feet hitches; a wayward stone, a rocky patch of ground, but whatever it was, it sends Scar crashing to the ground with much flailing.

“... And it’s something you’re now without,” Cub says, amused, leaning over him.

“Nonsense!” Scar says, getting to his feet and brushing himself off as best he can, “This happens all the time!”

“Uh-huh.”

“You have no faith in me,” Scar says, pouting, “None at all!”

“Nope.” Cub replies, “S’why I’m coming with you. Someone has to keep you from dying on the way out of here.”

Scar sighs, long and dramatic, “The Nether is not Scar safe.”

“Neither is the rest of the world,” Cub shrugs, “I better stick with you then. For safety.”

Scar grins and holds out a hand to Cub. He takes it, and together they look towards the way home.

“For safety.”

The first breath of air in the Overworld is the freshest Scar has ever tasted. The two of them collapse, shaky-limbed and Nether-stained, onto the forest floor beside the portal.

In an hour or so, Cub and Scar will pick themselves up off the ground, and they will make their way out of this taiga forest, and back to the civilization they knew. They will bury their wings at the edge of the forest, and they won't look back.

Tomorrow, they will sleep under the stars, and Scar's knees are scraped from every tree root he's tripped over, but his stomach hurts from laughing and the color has returned to Cub's face.

In a week, they find their way back to the wagons, and Cub is greeted as a long lost son as much as Scar is; and the woman with the golden eyes smiles at them both, even as Scar explains exactly what he gave up.

In a few months, he will have gotten used to it. The golden eyes, the bad turns, the memory of copper in his mouth. It comes and goes in waves, his never-ending font of misfortune. He takes it, laughs at it, never lets it get him down. Metaphorically, of course, as he and Cub's wheelchair design comes in useful over the next few years.

In the next few years, he'll find what he has been searching for his whole life.

A home.

A safe place for him and Cub, a place to build what *he* wants to build, not anyone else. With friends who make him laugh so much his stomach hurts, over and over and over again. For them, for his family, he counts himself pretty damn lucky. Even if he isn't technically supposed to be. But he *found* them, found people like him. Etho covers his face, and his eyes are a familiar shade of gold. He doesn't say anything to Scar, and Scar doesn't ask. The other hermits are just as eclectic; Grian, a spirit of a trickster in an avian form; Pearl, her eyes like the night sky; Impulse, netherkin and proud of it; Mumbo, dubiously human; Cleo, a zombie evading death; Bdubs, some kind of glare hybrid and on and on and on. No one asks about his eyes, and Scar finds that he's more than happy with that.

He swindles, he deals. He sells hats and becomes the mayor and tinkers with Cub over his wheelchair. He adopts Ellie and she never leaves his side. He lives, and he loves, and he has never been happier to be unfortunately mortal.

Scar is no longer lucky, not anymore. But he is persistent and skilled, and even more determinedly bull-headed.

And he makes his own luck.

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